

Maine School of Ministry, Spring 2020

**Questioning God, Challenging Faith: A Systematic Search for Understanding God, Suffering, and Evil (ThEth-Fdn 1)**

Class meetings: January 25, February 22, March 28, and April 25; 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Instructor: Deborah L. Goodwin, Ph.D. Contact email: [dgoodwin@gustavus.edu](mailto:dgoodwin@gustavus.edu)

**Course Description:** This course surveys some key topics in systematic (or “doctrinal”) theology: the nature of God, God’s relationship to humanity, and the saving work of Jesus Christ. The scholarship on each topic is vast and often highly technical, so this course will focus on the intersection between theoretical and practical concerns. Each class meeting will rely on foundational readings from Daniel Migliore’s *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, and bring them into conversation with other, sometimes conflicting, views. At the forefront will be questions about why bad things happen to good people, and which theological formulations respond adequately to that challenge.

Written assignments will be required before each class meeting, in response to prompts distributed in advance.

**Required texts** (available from Christian Book Distributors, <https://www.christianbook.com/> at a discount; 1-800-247-4784):

1. Daniel Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014. ISBN-13: 9780802871855
2. The Bible, preferably the New Revised Standard Version translation.
3. Additional readings will be distributed as PDFs. A single PDF containing the all the readings in assigned order will be made available before the start of the semester.

**Class One: Sources and Methods; Concepts of God (part 1)**

**Readings:**

1. Migliore, chs. 1-3, on the sources and methods of theology.
2. Migliore, ch. 4, “The Triune God”
3. Riswold, “Constructing Concepts of God,” excerpt.
4. Genesis 1-4 (i.e., all four books of Genesis).
5. William R. Jones, “Is God a White Racist?” excerpt.
6. Denis Edwards, “Characteristics of the Universe Revealed by the Sciences”
7. John Bowker, *The Problem of Suffering in the Religions of the World* excerpt, on Judaism.

**Class Two: Concepts of God (part 2); Human Nature (part 1)**

**Readings:**

1. Migliore, ch. 6, “The Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil,” and ch. 7, “Humanity as Creature, Sinner, and New Being in Christ”
2. Amitai Etzioni, “Good Grief.”

3. Kristine M. Raanka, *Women and the Value of Suffering*, "Excursus on Job."
4. Margaret Spufford, *Celebration* excerpts: "Bridget" and "Pain and Prayer."
5. David Blumenthal, "Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Practice" and "My Faith is Deeper Now."
6. Johann-Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews: Theology after Auschwitz"
7. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

### **Class Three: Human Nature (part 2) and Salvation in/through/with Jesus Christ (part 1)**

#### **Readings:**

1. Migliore, ch. 5, "The Good Creation" and ch. 8, "The Person and Work of Jesus Christ."
2. James Garvey, "Why Climate Change is a Moral Problem for You, Right Now"
3. Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson, "Moving Toward a Global Moral Consensus on Environmental Action"
4. Elizabeth Johnson, "The Humanity of Jesus" and "Jesus' Self-Knowledge," from *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology*
5. Ted Peters, "Six Ways of Salvation: How Does Jesus Save?"

### **Class Four: Salvation in/through/with Jesus Christ (part 2)**

#### **Readings:**

1. Migliore, ch. 9, "Confessing Jesus Christ in Context" and ch. 14, "Christian Hope;" Appendix B, "The Resurrection: A Dialogue"
2. Roger Haight, "Human Freedom and a Christian Understanding of Salvation as Liberation" from *The Future of Christology*
3. Elizabeth Johnson, "God and the Cross" from *Consider Jesus*

#### **Additional information:**

#### **Reading Guides and Writing Assignments.**

You will get the most out of this course if you prepare the reading well ahead of class. Plan on spending 3-4 hours of preparation for every hour of class time. Spread out over the semester, this amounts to one hour per weekday. Use the Guiding Questions supplied for each class in advance as tools to organize what you learn while reading.

#### **General instructions for writing assignments:**

- a. **Your papers should be no less than 750 words and no more than 1250** (3-5 pages double spaced). **Include a "word count"** at the end of your document.
  - a. **A hint:** Short is hard. It takes time, and multiple passes, to write briefly but meaningfully. Plan to write at least two drafts of these papers, and probably more at first. A good rule of thumb is to "write three times:"
    - i. Once to figure out what you want to say
    - ii. A second time, to say that -- and *only* that
    - iii. A third time, to say *only* what you want *appealingly*, in a way that engages your

readers

- b. Provide the author's name, a short title, and page number for any material that you reference, either in quotation or by paraphrase (summarizing in your own words). Inline citations are fine. Example: "He asks us to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing... (Francis, *Laudato Sí*, 8)." More information on what to cite, and how, can be found below.
- c. Use Calibri or Times 12-point Roman type, 1.5 spaces or double-spaced.
- d. Always spell-check your papers, but also proofread them carefully. Reading them aloud is a great way to catch simple mistakes.
- e. The MESOM rubric used to evaluate student work is found below.

### Using Source Materials Honestly\*

Good scholarship is often compared to a conversation. Among other things, it observes the basic courtesies common in conversations. If we tell someone else's joke successfully, we should give them credit for it, for instance. Whether the source is a book, an article, a website, or a friend, good scholarship requires that we make it clear when we have used another source in our writing, clearly identify which elements of our work derived from that source. This is true whether we quote *verbatim* from another writer or if we put their ideas in our own words.

### Examples

You want to use the following sentence by biblical scholar Howard Kee in a paper: "At the center of the text is the saving action of God on behalf of Israel." What's the correct way to include this idea in your paper on the same biblical passage? Any of the following is acceptable.

#### Sentences making acceptable use of sources:

- Kee writes that the main theme of this passage is "the saving action of God on behalf of Israel" (Kee, p. 169).
- According to Kee (p. 169), the major idea here is God's saving action.
- The passage focuses on the idea that God acts to save Israel (see Kee, p. 169).

Each example uses Kee's idea, **credits** Kee for it and **tells the reader** where to find Kee's original statement. The author's full name, the book title, and place, publisher, and date of publication will appear on your bibliography.

#### Sentences that illustrate unacceptable uses of sources:

- The main theme of this passage is the saving action of God.
  - [Comment: This idea and the very words came from Kee. He is not credited. This is plagiarism.]
- The major idea is God's redeeming action.
  - [Comment: I got the word "redeeming" from the thesaurus on my computer. I simply replaced one word of Kee's with another word, and still haven't given him credit for the idea. Using someone's idea, even in new words, without giving proper credit, is plagiarism.]
- The passage centers on the idea that God doesn't just sit there; God acts to save humanity.
  - [Comment: Trickier example, but two things make it plagiarism: 1) this sentence uses Kee's idea, although in expanded form, as if it were the writer's own; 2) this sentence uses Kee's insight that the central idea in the text is God's action. Using another person's *ideas*, even when you expand on them, without crediting that person, is plagiarism.]

\*This statement was adapted from the syllabi of Faith Kirkham Hawkins, formerly on the faculty of Gustavus Adolphus College.

**Maine School of Ministry Evaluation Rubric, used for individual assignments and overall achievement:**

1. **Completed with Distinction:** Shows superior grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in timely fashion. Participates with intelligent questions and comments. Evidence of mature critical thought, analysis and insights in class and in assignments. Evidence of independent interest and pursuit of further knowledge in the subject matter. High level of competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.
2. **Completed with Promise:** Shows ready grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in timely fashion. Evidence of understanding and growth in ability to understand the Bible critically and in context, and willingness to participate in discussions and interactions. Competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.
3. **Completed:** Shows interest and basic level of understanding of material presented in class and readings. Completed all assigned work, sometimes but not always, in timely fashion. Basic grasp of content and openness to growth in knowledge and proficiency. Limited participation in class discussions. Improvement needed in written work, e.g., grammar, punctuation, style, clarity, argumentation, and organization.
4. **Did not Complete:** Failed to turn in or complete assigned work without prior consultation with instructor. Absent without contacting instructor and arranging for makeup plan. Submitted written work at unacceptably low level of competence. Less than cooperative attitude or readiness to learn displayed in class.